



PHOTO
MUSEUM
IRELAND

Akihiko Okamura

The Memories of Others

11 April – 06 July 2024

Photo Museum Ireland presents the world premiere of Japanese photographer Akihiko Okamura's Irish work in April 2024.

From the late 1960s to the early 1980s, renowned Japanese war photographer Akihiko Okamura (1929-1985) created a remarkable and largely unseen body of work in Ireland, North and South. This exhibition, the result of many years of research and collaboration, will launch a major programme including a documentary film and the first publication on Okamura's Irish work.

After covering the Vietnam War in the early 1960s, Akihiko Okamura went to Ireland in 1968 to visit the country of JFK's ancestors. Soon after, in 1969, he decided to move to Ireland, settling down in the South of Dublin. From then on, he continually photographed the conflict in the North and his life with his family in the South, until he suddenly passed away in 1985. His photographs of Ireland, which have barely been seen before, demonstrate a unique artistic vision. This uniqueness is partly due to the fact that Okamura chose to live in Ireland: of all the international photographers active during those years, he was in this sense a singular case of absolute commitment to Irish and Northern Irish history. This distinctive relationship with his subject matter, both as an outsider and as an insider, led him to create images which were innovative both in terms of his own practice and of the photographic representation of the Troubles. His profound, personal connection with Ireland allowed him to develop a new method of documenting conflict, searching for poetic, peaceful and ethereal moments of everyday life in a time of war.

Unlike other representations of the North of Ireland at that time, Okamura's photographs are almost all in colour. His photographs, close to still lives, break away from the photojournalistic tradition. Their gentle, muted palette operates in counterpoint to the violent situation in which they were produced. In many ways, they are remarkably out of sync with the conventional, black-and-white, "heroic" photographic representations that have come to define this period. Okamura's work reveals a more distant and patient perspective, beyond conventional photographic representations of riots, burning cars and bombed buildings. He chose to focus on quieter, intimate, quasi-surreal moments that revealed his deeply rooted concern for and closeness to the communities he photographed. This intuitive narrative choice reflected the depth of his attachment to Ireland and the Irish people. Although Okamura remains well-known and respected in Japan, his Irish body of work and experience in Ireland, while crucial to his oeuvre and

personal life, had hardly been examined until now. The rediscovery of this archive constitutes a revelation both for the history of Japanese photography and Irish history.

Book Launch *The Memories of Others*: A new book published by acclaimed publishers Atelier EXB (co-published in English by Prestel), edited by Pauline Vermare and featuring essays by Pauline Vermare, Masako Toda, Seán O'Hagan and texts by Kusi Okamura and Trish Lambe accompanies the exhibition priced €45.

Film Premiere *The Memories of Others*: A new documentary film uncovering Akihiko Okamura's extraordinary Irish work and the artistic and emotional impact of its recent rediscovery. Directed by Pauline Vermare and Marc Lesser. Produced by Lucky Tiger Productions, New York 2023, colour - 20 minutes duration.

Akihiko Okamura's biography: Akihiko Okamura was born in 1929 in Tokyo. He began training in medicine but withdrew from his studies to join the editorial team at *New Weekly* in 1961. Assigned to a story in Bangkok, he turned to photography, going on to record international conflicts. He distinguished himself as a very important war photographer in Vietnam in the 1960s. There, he photographed, among others, the prisoners of war held by the Vietcong after he himself was held by them for 53 days. His work appeared in *Life* and other major publications at the time. Constantly striving to tell the story of conflicts and human rights violations, Okamura's photojournalism took him to conflict zones from Ethiopia to Biafra, and Northern Ireland. He cited his own "dark memory" of childhood terror in Tokyo under Second World War bombing attacks as the source of his urge to tell the story of conflicts through pictures. Akihiko Okamura settled in Ireland with his family in 1969 and lived there until he passed away in 1985.

Digitisation of Akihiko Okamura's Irish work: This programme has been made possible through the digitisation of Okamura's Irish work undertaken by Brendan Maher, digital archivist at Photo Museum Ireland under the direction of Masako Toda, Director of the Okamura Archive, Tokyo.. It is the result of many years of research and collaborations seeking to cast light on this extraordinary archive and elucidate the "Okamura mystery": Why would a Japanese person choose to settle down and start a family in Ireland at the height of the conflict? Why was he so tied to a history that was not his own, and to the memories of others? While the mystery also contributes to the beauty of this archive, a few elements help us to better understand Okamura's fate and the historical and contemporary scope of his work." Pauline Vermare

CURATORIAL TEAM:

The project team is led by curator, writer and photo historian Pauline Vermare working with curator, writer and photo historian Masako Toda, writer Seán O'Hagan, writer, and Trish Lambe and Archivist Brendan Maher, Photo Museum Ireland.

PAULINE VERMARE: Pauline Vermare is a French photography historian and curator based in New York. She was previously the cultural director of Magnum Photos, New York, and a curator at the International Center of Photography, The Museum of Modern Art and the Henri Cartier-Bresson Foundation. Her doctoral dissertation focused on the visual representation of Northern Ireland from 1969 to 2022. She is the author of numerous interviews and essays on photography. Pauline Vermare grew up in France and in Japan and has been working on

several projects around the history of Japanese photography over the years including this new project showcasing the Irish work of Akihiko Okamura. She sits on the Boards of the Saul Leiter Foundation and the Catherine Leroy Fund.

MASAKO TODA: Masako Toda is a photo historian, author, and curator of Japanese photography. She holds a masters from The University of Tokyo, Department of Humanities and Sociology. Toda is a lecturer at Musashino Art University, and Tokyo College of Photography, among others. In 2006, she was awarded the incentive award by the Japan Society for Arts and History of Photography. Toda's field of expertise is the history of modernism as well as postwar Japanese photography. She compiled a book about Akihiko Okamura's Photographs and Texts in 2020 by Akaaka Art Publishing. She is also the author of the photography monograph *Hisae Imai*, published by Akaaka Art Publishing, in 2022, and co-author of *Japanese Photography Magazines 1880s-1980s* published by Goliga in 2022. She is the curatorial expert for the Estate of Akihiko Okamura.

SEÁN O'HAGAN: Seán O'Hagan is an award-winning journalist who has interviewed many major artists, writers and musicians over the last four decades. Brought up in Armagh he has written extensively about his experience of the Troubles. As an undergraduate, he studied English in London. O'Hagan began his media career as a writer for *NME*, *The Face* and *Arena*, and during this period became interested in photography. He has since established an international reputation as a writer on photography for *The Guardian* and a features writer for *The Observer*. In 2003, he received the British Press Award for Interviewer of the Year. In 2011, he was the sole recipient of the J. Dudley Johnston Award from the Royal Photographic Society "for major achievement in the field of photographic criticism". In 2022, Canongate in the U.K. and Farrar, Strauss & Giroux in the US simultaneously published *Faith, Hope, and Carnage*, O'Hagan's long-form lockdown conversation with musician, Nick Cave, which became a *Sunday Times* bestseller.

JORDAN ALVES: Born in 1989, Jordan Alves initially studied the applied arts, specialising in industrial design. After various experiences in this field, he turned to the visual arts and exhibition curating. Encountering these territories, photography book publishing became an important focus of interest, and his meeting with Xavier Barral in 2015 marked the beginning of his journey within the eponymous publishing house. His collaboration with the publisher sharpened his curiosity for images, and the editorial demands that were passed on to him became an objective to be achieved for all projects. Each publication is a dialogue with the artists and a singular object. Since 2020, Jordan Alves has been associated with Atelier EXB, taking over from Xavier Barral in the publishing adventure with his 4 partners.

TRISH LAMBE: Trish Lambe is the Artistic Director/CEO at Photo Museum Ireland, Ireland's national centre for contemporary photography. She is overall responsible for exhibition curation, artistic programming and the museum's artists' archiving initiative. Her curatorial practice is concerned with social and political issues in Ireland. Recent projects include the *Reframing the Border* 5-year cross-border programme and the *In Our Own Image* year-long survey of contemporary practices in Ireland. She founded the *Photo Album of the Irish* vernacular photography project and is a nominator for awards and commissions including the Deutsche Borse Prize and the Prix Pictet.

BRENDAN MAHER: Brendan Maher is an experienced photography archivist, curator and fine art printer. A specialist in the field of photography digitisation, archiving, copyright and licensing, he is the Collection Manager for Photo Museum Ireland's Archive of Irish Contemporary Photography collection. He previously worked at the National Gallery of Ireland and Archives Ireland. He holds an MA in Photography from Ulster University.

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Akihiko Okamura (1929 - 1985), Milk bottles on doorstep, Ireland, 1970s.

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Akihiko Okamura (1929 - 1985), British soldier carrying a door, Bombay Street, West Belfast, Northern Ireland, 1969.

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Akihiko Okamura (1929 - 1985), The Fountain Street, Derry city, Northern Ireland, c.1969.
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Akihiko Okamura (1929 - 1985), Local women standing near their burnt-out homes, Bombay Street, West Belfast, Northern Ireland, 1969.
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Akihiko Okamura (1929 - 1985), Memorial at scene of shooting, Bogside, Derry city, Northern Ireland, c.1970.

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Akihiko Okamura (1929 - 1985), Street memorial on Lecky Road, Derry, marking the site where Desmond Beattie (19 years old) was shot and killed on 8 July 1971 by the British Army. Seamus Cusack (28 years old) was shot dead near this spot about twelve hours later. These men were the first people shot dead by the British Army in Derry.

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Akihiko Okamura (1929 - 1985), Bombed-out building, Belfast city centre, Northern Ireland, 1970s
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Akihiko Okamura (1929 - 1985), Man with injured foot on the train reading *The Dogs of War* by Frederick Forsythe, Northern Ireland, 1976.
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Akihiko Okamura (1929 - 1985), South Dublin, Ireland, c. 1978.

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Akihiko Okamura (1929 - 1985), Clothesline, Ireland, c.1978 .

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